

**MINUTES OF THE SR 167 HOT LANE TOLL RATES SPECIAL MEETING
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
January 24, 2008**

The special meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m., on Thursday, January 24, 2008 at the Renton City Hall, 1055 South Grady Way, Renton, Washington.

Introduction and Welcome

Chair Ford opened the meeting announcing that the Commission is here today to listen to the Washington State Department of Transportation's presentation and hear public comment regarding toll rate setting on the SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project.

Patty Rubstello, Project Manager, SR 167 HOT Lanes Project, WSDOT, explained that the goal today is to provide a high clipped overview of the project timelines and toll setting process.

Hot Lanes overview

SR 167 runs through the Kent/Auburn valley. The HOV lanes on SR 167 will be converted to HOT lanes. Key features of HOT lanes are that they perform at 45 miles per hour – 90 percent during peak periods. There is nine miles of HOT lanes with 10 access points. HOV 2⁺ and motorcycles will have free access to the HOT lanes. Drivers with Good To Go transponders who also carpool may obtain a shield to deactivate the transponder when they carpool. Operational hours will be 24 hours a day with the typical toll between 5 a.m. and 7 p.m. The HOT lane revenue will be used to pay for operations and maintenance, increased enforcement and incident response in the corridor. A portion may also be dedicated to increase transit, vanpool, carpool and other services for the SR 167 corridor.

What will the HOT lanes look like

The HOT lanes will be separated from the general lanes by a double-white line. It is illegal to cross the double white line. Drivers can enter HOT lanes at the beginning of the HOT lanes or at several mid-point access locations: four access points are proposed for the northbound lane and three for the southbound lane.

How the toll system will work

Good To Go transponders affixed to vehicle windshields will be required to use the HOT lanes. Good To Go service centers will assist with establishing accounts or accounts can be setup online by visiting <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/goodtogo/>. As you pass under the toll gantry the advertised toll rate will be deducted from your Good To Go account. This process is seamless and requires no slow-downs or toll booths.

The price to enter the HOT lane will average between .50 cents and \$9 per trip. The price is based on flexible pricing and rises and falls automatically to keep traffic moving. A flashing light at access points will signify when a vehicle drives through with an active

transponder. If the light does not flash, Washington State Patrol will check to see if there are two or more people in the vehicle. Additional troopers will be on patrol to ensure that drivers have entered the HOT lanes legally.

HOT lanes: Successful elsewhere

HOT lanes have been successful in other states; such as California, Texas, Minnesota and Colorado. Surveys from a study in California found that HOT lanes were popular and the benefits were enjoyed widely by travelers at all income levels. Surveys also indicate that most drivers don't use the HOT lanes every day – they use them only when they require a reliable trip.

Public Comment

Cory Cappelletti, citizen, asked how the transponder will be deactivated if there are two individuals in the vehicle.

Ms. Rubstello responded that a shield can be purchased to cover the transponder that will deactivate it.

Mr. Cappelletti asked why the next public hearing will be in Olympia...he suggested Kent or Auburn.

Paul Hasse, citizen, shared that after following this project for nearly a year he supports the concept. He emphasized that he is glad that the tolls collected will stay with transportation as opposed to going to the general fund. Secondly, the cost of administering the program should not be exorbitant.

Charles Thomas, citizen, questioned the pros and cons of the project. He expressed that we are paying for something that we've already paid for and this is just another means of making money. If people were going to carpool they would be doing that already. If the lanes are restricted the majority of the traffic on the corridor will be restricted, as most of the traffic is single occupancy vehicles (SOV). The HOV should be opened to all traffic. Park and rides only work as well as the transit service, which is minimal to say the least. The time involved in riding transit just makes it easier to drive.

Commissioner Moser suggested that it might be helpful to give an explanation of how traffic moves in HOT lanes.

Ms. Rubstello explained that it is clearly identified that HOV lanes carry more people, specifically on I-5, than all the general purpose lanes.

Commissioner O'Neal emphasized that Mr. Thomas' concern is valid and needs to be addressed. Why not build more lanes? The answer is that additional lanes cost a lot of money. The point is we are trying to use the existing system more efficiently, moving people and not just vehicles. HOT lanes offer opportunity for SOV to use the HOT lane to move traffic faster. Experiences elsewhere indicate that this works very well.

Commissioner Distler noted that if all three lanes are opened more vehicles will move, but the incentive to carpool goes away, therefore fewer people will be moved. This pilot tends to maximize the incremental space in a way that doesn't cause the existing users who will not pay to decouple from the carpool concept.

Daniel Bortles, citizen, shared that having been a resident of the area all of his life he has seen so much growth, especially south King and Pierce Counties. Perhaps the HOT lanes should be open to general purpose traffic after the high traffic hours. That way people are not penalized for using the roadway system that they have already paid for, because of the growth eventually more lanes will have to be built anyway because of the demands on the system. He emphasized that we need to build before we need it. That way we are not always trying to catch up with the demand.

Commissioner Stedman emphasized that this is a "pilot project" and things might change as we move forward over the next four years.

Commissioner O'Neal expressed that this not a penalty, but an opportunity to keep traffic moving at an optimum speed.

Victor Eskenezi, citizen, expressed that he is totally against the HOT lanes concept, but has options to offer. People that do not have the money do not have the option. He suggested that the Commission consider global warming and climate change and charge fees according to vehicle types...larger more expensive vehicles should pay more.

Chair Ford expressed that greenhouse gases come from all vehicle types and congestion is the big offender. HOT lanes will have a limited impact on greenhouse gases.

Mr. Eskenezi asked if there is more than one HOT lane in each direction.

Ms. Rubstello responded that "no" there is only one HOT lane in each direction and two general purpose lanes. Use of the HOT lanes requires that a transponder with an active Good To Go account be mounted on the windshield of the vehicle.

Mr. Eskenezi requested help with establishing on-demand carpools.

Chair Ford encouraged him to contact WSDOT's Trip Reduction Program for assistance.

Jon Schlumpf, citizen, asked if the toll would be the same when using a portion of the HOT lane.

Ms. Rubstello responded that the toll you pay upon entry into the HOT lanes is for the entire trip.

Mr. Schlumpf asked why SR 167 is a good candidate for this project as opposed to other routes.

Ms. Rubstello explained that SR 167 was selected based on its available capacity. The project required less investment because there was roadway width available.

Mr. Cappelletti asked why there is a sales tax on transponders. Also, will semi trucks and big box trucks will be allowed to use the lanes.

Chair Ford responded that they are excluded based on weight other than buses.

Mr. Cappelletti asked how far in advance of entry point is the price posted.

Ms. Rubstello responded that it's approximately 300 feet.

Mr. Cappelletti asked if there will be time to exit the HOT lane in order to take exits.

Ms. Rubstello responded that the lanes were designed with that in mind. The benefit of the designated access points is predictable, because you can plan when to move out of the lanes.

Mr. Cappelletti asked if you will be cited for moving out of the lane at a non-designated point in the event of an accident.

Ms. Rubstello stated that WSP would not typically cite for this occurrence.

Commissioner Distler asked why exit of the lane is not allowed at any point.

Ms. Rubstello responded that's a good question to research.

George Huston, citizen, asked if the HOT lanes require a transponder. Also, is this a revenue enhancement or traffic flow management?

Chair Ford responded that it is primarily for traffic flow.

Mr. Huston emphasized that it must be for revenue, otherwise you would be able to pay by segment.

Commissioner Forner explained that this pilot is primarily for traffic flow. The revenue will be used to maintain the system.

Chair Ford adjourned the public hearing at 8 p.m.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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